Iraivan Rises
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TEMPLES

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The only all-granite, hand-carved Hindu Temple in the Western Hemisphere manifests in Hawaii

When seven stone craftsmen left Bangalore, India, for Kauai, Hawaii, in May of 2001, they brought hammers, charcoal and lots of chisels, but left their blacksmith's forge at home. They didn't need itÃand not because they planned to spend $1,000 plus shipping on a brand new one bought off the Web. They didn't need that either. Within a few hours of their arrival at the Iraivan Temple work site in Kauai, they were blasting 1,300ÂiF heat from a four-foot-tall furnace they crafted themselves out of old fire bricks and river mud. Before noon of the same day, that forge was blessed by the monastic priests of nearby Kadavul Temple. An hour after that, the carvers were chipping stone with chisels sharpened at the new hearth.

It was a monumental moment. While the hand-carving of granite stones for Kauai's Iraivan Temple has been going on in Bangalore full force since 1990, the arrival of those stones and the necessary carvers qualified to

fit and assemble them in Hawaii was a significant event. To mark the importance of this turning point, a special celebration was arranged with V. Ganapati Sthapati, master artisan in charge of Iraivan construction, and his foremost assistant, Selvanathan Sthapati. Shanmuga SthapatiÃ who oversaw for Ganapati Sthapati the construction of the world's largest stone statue, the 133-foot-tall Tiruvalluvar at Cape Comorin, IndiaÃ arrived with the carvers to be the on-site supervisor of the Iraivan construction on Kauai. The artisans joined Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Publisher of Hinduism Today and founder of Iraivan Temple, to prepare for and conduct the May 31st Prathama Sila Sthapanam ceremonies (First Stone Setting) of Iraivan Temple. Shortly thereafter, six containers of stone were unloaded onto the foundation and uncrated. Assembly began immediately.

On Sunday, July 22, amidst grand Guru Purnima festivities at Kauai's Hindu Monastery, when Iraivan construction was into its third course, Gurudeva and his monastics hosted over 400 island friends for an open house day and a luncheon called "A Taste of India." After the Mayor of Kauai, Maryanne Kusaka, honored the carvers with garlands, she andother guests joined in with traditional hammer and chisel in hand to carve a little of the temple themselves.

In another historic move, master musicians specializing in playing the tavil and nagaswaram (South Indian temple drum and horn) were flown to Kauai for the duration of the festival to perform during temple pujas as well as at the open house. A full Indian vegetarian lunch, with over 20 unique dishes, was served to all.

On September 4, the important Gomugai stone was placed in the third course. Amid chanting and prayers, Gurudeva set and blessed the ornate water spout stone (see photo in print edition) enshrined to channel water poured over the crystal Siva Lingam to the right side of the sanctum where worshippers partake of it as a blessed sacrament.

The temple was conceived shortly after Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami had a mystic vision of Lord Siva in Kauai in 1975 [See Hinduism Today, December, 1998]. Today, 27 years later, "Iraivan"as it has come to be knownÃis blooming into full manifestation. This is legend in the making. Not in recent history have any temples been completely carved out of granite. And never

in modern times has this sort of carving been done completely by hand.

Now in Bangalore, the craftsmen are focusing their carving efforts on the 12 pillars and 14 roof beams that will connect into the upper courses of the sanctum that is being assembled on Kauai. Another five containers of stones, for courses seven to 13, have just arrived by ship from India. While there is much more to be done, the vision of Iraivan is becoming reality.